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SUBJECT Arms Shipment to Iran

PETER JENNINGS: And now a closer at the actual arms shipment to Iran. Yesterday the Attorney General told the nation that these arms for Iran operations had been run by Lt. Colonel Oliver North and were stage managed by him from the White House.

Today, we have learned the NSC was not the only agency to involved. In Washington, here's ABC senior correspondent John Scali.

JOHN SCALI: Top U.S. officials have told ABC News that the Central Intelligence Agency flew American weapons to Iran aboard a CIA controlled aircraft nearly two months before the President authorized such shipments.

The flight, in November of 1985, is reported to have carried 10W antitank missiles, parts for Hawk antiaircraft missiles and other military supplies.

The CIA plane was made available, informants said, supposedly to meet a request from the National Security Council for a safe, secure way to transport parts of Israeli oil drilling equipment to Iraq. Informed sources believe the request was a cover to get active CIA involvement.

The modern U.S.-made weapons were part of the cargo that was flown to Teheran by a jet transport operated by Southern Airways, an airline which often has been identified as connected with CIA secret missions.

One informant said, CIA director, William Casey has acknowledged a CIA unidentified backup role for operations

conducted for a secret NSC group led by Colonel Oliver North, who was fired yesterday.

Casey met with Senate & House Intelligence Committees to answer questions last Friday. The CIA flight, as well as its cargo, was discovered by some government officials, who were alarmed because it deepened the secret U.S. government involvement in weapons shipment to Iraq.

The CIA said tonight, Casey would have no comment. But he is reported to have told some authorities, he knew nothing about the November-CIA flight because he was out of the country at the time.

Some authorities investigating the operation however, are reported to believe that low-level CIA officials would not have dared to come involved without a high-level CIA go ahead.

John Scali, ABC News, Washington.